

The Plan

Luke 24:36-49

Today we wrap up our series in the gospel of Luke. One thing we've noticed throughout Luke (which is found in other gospels as well) is how often people second-guessed Jesus. They often tried to explain to him that he was mistaken about something he said or did. His enemies did this; the crowds did this; and even his disciples did this.

Perhaps the most egregious example is found in Matthew 16. Jesus had explained to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed, and be raised on the third day. In response Peter took him aside and "rebuked him" saying, "This shall never happen to you!" That's when Jesus replied, "Get behind me Satan! . . . You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Today we come to the last passage in the gospel of Luke. Before he goes back to his Father in heaven, Jesus tells his disciples "the plan" - what is going to happen after he's gone. We have to wonder. . . Having been crucified and raised from the dead "just as he said," does Jesus finally have enough credibility for the disciples to believe that his plan is wise and good? Or are they going to keep second-guessing him and trying to explain why his plan won't work in the "real world"? We'll have to look briefly at the book of Acts for the answer to those questions.

What I wonder is how we will respond to "the plan." Now that Jesus has been crucified and raised from the dead "just as he said," will we believe his plan is wise and good in our day? Or will we second guess him?

The Foundation of the Plan: the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:36-43) If the disciples weren't convinced of the bodily resurrection of Jesus, "the plan" was just a pipe dream. The scene is in Jerusalem where Jesus' disciples were gathered on that first Easter evening. They had been talking with the two men about a conversation they'd had with the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus (the passage we considered last week).

36 As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!"

The impression here is that Jesus appeared (as opposed to opening the door and walking in). He gave the common Jewish greeting, "Peace to you!" (*Shalom!*). Verse 37 records:

37 But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.

As we saw last week, the disciples weren't expecting Jesus to be raised from the dead. When Jesus appeared, they thought that they were seeing a spirit (or ghost) than the risen Christ. What Jesus does next is very significant. He addresses their troubled and doubting hearts.

38 And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

Jesus was intent on convincing them that He was the same person who had hung on the cross the previous Friday. He invited them to see with their eyes and touch with their hands the scars in His hands and feet. Jesus points out that a spirit (which by definition is a being w/o a body) does not have flesh and bones like He did.

40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

Jesus' resurrected body had (and has!) the scars from the spikes that were driven through His hands and feet. His body bears permanent reminders of his sacrifice for us. Verse 41 seems a bit “out of the blue”:

41 And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?”

It's highly unlikely that Jesus was suddenly hungry and wanted a snack. No, Jesus was eager to prove to them that He wasn't merely a spirit (which, as we all know, cannot eat real food). So he asked for something to eat. We read next:

42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate before them.

The fact that Jesus could “take and eat” a piece of broiled fish meant that He had a real, tangible body that could ingest food. We could speculate all day about the exact nature of Jesus' resurrected body, but a couple things are clear from this passage. First, there is continuity between His body that hung on the cross and His resurrected body (since He could show them His scars). Second, His resurrected body was tangible given the fact that they could touch Him and He could eat food.

Think about what Jesus is doing here. Before Jesus told the disciples the plan going forward, he convinced them that he had literally been raised bodily from the dead. Since they were going to be at the center of the plan, they **HAD** to know that it wasn't a pipe dream or a hallucination. They needed to know in their heart of hearts that God had raised Jesus from the dead, validating everything Jesus had said and done. First, they needed to be convinced.

Second, if they were convinced they would be convincing. If they were convinced of the resurrection, they would have the credibility of **first-hand eyewitnesses**. John, for example, when he wrote the letter we call 1 John, began by pointing out that Jesus was someone “which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands. . .” (1 John 1:1). The documents in our New Testament were all written by people who either saw Jesus raised from the dead or who were close to people who had (e.g., Luke).

The same thing is true for us: If we aren't convinced that Jesus died for our sins and then was raised bodily from the dead, our lives and our words won't be convincing.

Some of you may be familiar with the game called Jenga. You begin by stacking up layers of wooden blocks in an overlapping pattern to form a tower. To play the game you take turns removing a block from somewhere in the stack; you lose the game when you remove a block that causes the rest of the tower to collapse. In the Christian faith, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is like that block. If you remove the resurrection of Jesus from Christianity, the whole thing collapses. In 1 Corinthians 15:17 Paul said that "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless."

But the converse is also true: if Jesus **has been** raised from the dead, your faith is **priceless**. Jesus' resurrection validates everything He said and did - including his plan moving forward. That's what Luke records in verses 44-49.

The Plan Moving Forward (Luke 24:44-49) In these verses Jesus reiterates what he had told the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, namely that the entire Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) demanded that the Messiah die and be resurrected.

44 Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

For three years Jesus had been telling them that he would fulfill everything written about the Messiah in the Old Testament. But as we've seen throughout Luke, **before** the resurrection the disciples didn't and couldn't understand what Jesus was saying about dying and rising again. They didn't have a category for a crucified Messiah. In Luke 18:34 Luke actually records, "But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said."

But on that first Easter evening after they'd been convinced that Jesus was raised bodily from the dead, they were ready to understand.

45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

Jesus supernaturally gave them the capacity to understand the teachings of Scripture. What was once opaque and confusing became crystal clear.

46 and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,

As we discussed last week, the Messiah's death and resurrection was "hidden in plain sight" (as they say) in the Hebrew Scriptures. Isaiah had talked about the Messiah as the Suffering Servant on whom "the iniquities of us all" was laid. The Psalms talked about the Messiah as the king who would sit on the throne of David forever.

For the first time, they understood that everything that had happened that weekend was planned by God long ago. Jesus' death and resurrection were at the very center of the drama of Scripture (which is the drama of history). Jesus opened their minds to understand this.

But in verse 47 Jesus adds an additional element that was demanded by the Hebrew Scriptures, namely, the plan going forward:

47 and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

The plan all along was for people from every nation on earth to have the opportunity to repent and have their sins forgiven on the basis of Jesus' death and resurrection. Scriptures such as Isaiah 49:6 spoke of God's plan that his Servant/Messiah would be for **all nations**, not merely for the Jewish nation.

6 he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

If God was going to send his unique Son to die for sins, it wasn't going to be for just one small tribe. It was always God's plan that his salvation would reach the ends of the earth.

At this point the disciples might have been thinking, "Okay. . . sounds ambitious. . . I wonder how that is going to happen. . ." Jesus continues to unfold the plan in verses 48 and 49:

48 You are witnesses of these things.

Since they were eyewitnesses of the things that had happened, they had a unique role to play. They could give a firsthand account of the death and resurrection of Jesus. And since their minds were opened to understand the Scriptures, they could explain to the nations in a coherent way that Jesus had died and risen for them also! [This was reiterated in Acts 1:8.] Furthermore, we read in verse 49:

49 And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

The "promise of my Father" was the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:4-5). The implication is that the Holy Spirit would empower them to bear witness to all the nations.

Jesus' Departure to the Father (Luke 24:50-53)

50 And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them.
51 While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. 52

And they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple blessing God.

Jesus had made his departure back to his Father in heaven. His disciples remained here on earth waiting in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high.

To summarize: Jesus convinced them that he was raised bodily from the dead (so that their faith in him was solid and well-placed). Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he assured them that they would be clothed with power from heaven so that they would take this message of forgiveness of sins to the nations.

This sounds like a solid plan, but the disciples didn't have a great track record. Just three nights earlier Peter had denied three times that he even knew Jesus, and the rest had run out of fear. It wasn't a slam dunk that they were going to have the insight and the internal strength to take the message of Jesus to the nations.

But if you read the book of Acts (Luke's companion volume to his gospel), you will see that that's exactly what happened. We don't have any record that they second-guessed Jesus about this plan. Seven weeks later, on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit descended upon Jesus' disciples. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in languages they'd never learned. Jerusalem was filled with people "from every nation under heaven" (that was no coincidence). That day the nations heard these disciples speaking in *their* languages about "the mighty works of God."

And when Peter got up to explain to the crowd what was happening, guess what? He sounds a lot like Jesus. He opened the Scriptures and explained that what was happening was the fulfillment of what had been written in the Scriptures.

- * He explained that this outpouring of the Spirit is what the prophet Joel had prophesied. (Acts 2:17-21)
- * He explained that David in Psalm 16 was speaking about Jesus when he talked about God not abandoning him in the grave (Acts 2:25-28)
- * He explained that David in Psalm 110 spoke of Jesus when he wrote, "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." (Acts 2:34-35)
- * He explained that everything that weekend had happened "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (it was no mistake - Acts 2:23)
- * He explained that "we are all witnesses" of Jesus being raised from the dead (Acts 2:32)

About 3,000 people believed and were baptized that day. If you keep reading the book of Acts, you'll see that the message of Jesus went from Jerusalem all the way to Rome. And Paul had plans to go to Spain. And you will also read that these original disciples were willing to die carrying out the plan of Jesus. He had told them, "People will treat you the way they treat me."

And because they and many, many others understood that this plan was good and wise, here we are on the other side of the world almost 2,000 years later worshipping Jesus in this room. It turns out that the plan was solid. Jesus knew what he was talking about.

This passage got me to thinking about the three guys who shared Christ with me when I was a sophomore in college. I was a life-of-the-party kind of guy; but my personal life was a mess. I was unbelievably self-centered and I didn't even know it. And I was lonely. These three guys (Bob, Stewart, Joel) didn't take me on as their spiritual project; they befriended me. And because they had experienced Jesus so deeply, they spoke with conviction and compassion. They spoke very naturally. They could bear witness to the power of God in their lives. They were convinced and they were convincing. That was Jesus' plan.

Honestly, my prayer for us as individuals and as a church is that we would stop second guessing Jesus and would see his plan as good and wise. The building blocks are the same.

- * Same foundation: the death and resurrection of Christ. If he really died for our sin and rose on the third day, **our** faith is priceless. There's nothing as valuable as forgiveness of sin and the freedom that goes with it. As it's been said, when you're ready to die, then you're ready to live.
- * Same experience with the Scriptures: As we talked about last week, if we **immerse ourselves in the Scriptures in community**, God will open our minds and give us understanding. This doesn't happen as we sit on the couch watching Jeopardy. It happens as we hear Scripture taught, as we read and ponder Scripture privately, as we talk about Scripture with others. God reshapes the deep structures of our minds. One of the main things that changes is the way we look at others. God gives us a compassion for people in a very comprehensive way; we want to see people thrive physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. We want people to experience the same forgiveness and freedom that we've experienced.
- * Same empowering Holy Spirit: When you believe in Christ, God puts his very Spirit within you. The Holy Spirit - who hovered over the surface of the deep at creation, who empowered the prophets, who raised Jesus from the dead! Instead of asking, "What can I pull off given my intelligence and my personality?" we ask, "What does THE Holy Spirit want to do through me - through my life and my words?"

My prayer - which I believe is God's will - is that we as individuals and as a church will be "all in" when it comes to Jesus' plan. It is good and wise for every church everywhere in every generation.